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ABSTRACT

Reasons to de-emphasize testing as a means of assessing teacher quality are offered in this paper. The following questions pertinent to teacher testing are asked: (1) Granted that teacher education is now attracting low caliber students, can the testing movement reverse the trend? (2) Is it justifiable to determine, and even predict, the quality of the end product of entry level performance? and (3) Is there a significant positive correlation between high test scores and teaching success? Correlations between NTE (National Teacher Examinations) scores and teachers' on-the-job performance are discussed. Implications of the testing movement include the following: (1) the inability of tests to improve the overall quality of those who wish to enter the teaching profession; (2) the potential for unfairly weeding out minority candidates whose test taking skills may be less sophisticated; and (3) the potential for undermining the educational reform movement by causing prospective and experienced teachers to avoid employment where tests are required. (LMO)

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QUALITY TEACHERS : IS TESTING THE ANSWER ?

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QUALITY TEACHERS : IS TESTING THE ANSWER ?

One of the focal points of the current education reform movement sweeping across the nation is the issue of attracting quality teachers into the classroom. The need for quality teachers became a front burner issue with the publication of **A Nation at Risk**. It is apparent that the role of teachers in attaining educational excellence cannot be overemphasized, hence the great demand for excellence in teachers: an excellence that is being sought, largely, through test scores. One does not question the need for quality teachers in the classroom, but when teacher quality is seen in terms of high test scores alone, then, there is a need for concern. In using testing to measure excellence in teachers, we are pre-supposing the existence of certain measurable characteristics and competencies in these teachers. The fact of the matter is, of the characteristics that may be deemed relevant to effective teaching, testing can only assess what Levin (1980) has categorized as knowledge and personality attributes. It is just these attributes that are tested by the two predominant test forms that teachers are subjected to : namely, Competency Tests and the National Teacher Examinations.

The use of these test forms, however, is developing a certain trend - a trend that is creating a testing continuum : a continuum with a front-end, a rear-end, and a professional-end. The front-end of the testing continuum is the test component of the teacher education admission requirement. This component may take the form of an internally designed college/university

competency test or an external competency test like the ACT COMP. The rear-end of the continuum is the exit requirement for certification which is increasingly becoming an external examination in the form of the National Teacher Examinations. To date, 30 states are requiring these entry and exit competency tests with 10 other states considering the possibility of using them, and the chances are that more states will soon follow suit.

One needs to point out, however, that the use of testing to screen out prospective teachers, whether at the entry level or the exit level, is not a phenomenon of the 1980's. What is new to the profession, and disturbing to some teachers, is the attempt to test certified teachers too, before recertifying them. This intrusion of testing into the professional lives of teachers, though somewhat unpopular, seems to be gaining momentum. According to Phi Delta Kappa Gallup poll reports, the public is becoming increasingly supportive of testing teachers. In 1979, 85 percent of those polled supported testing teachers. This percentage dropped to 84 in 1981, but shot up to 89 percent in 1984. In 1985, Arkansas became the first state to require certified teachers to pass a competency test in order to renew their licences.

TO TEST OR NOT TO TEST ?

It appears that the notion to test teachers has become almost an obsession with certain sectors of the society; but one cannot blame such people because the teachers and the public schools have given tax payers legitimate excuse to make these demands.

With declining test scores in the schools and claims from scholars like Ornstein and Levin (1981) that "there are data which suggest that many teachers cannot tell good prose from bad, and can neither write nor speak properly", and that "some are even illiterate" (p.35), the public is justified to clamor for something to be done, and fast. Other disquieting evidence also tend to justify the test "craze". In 1976 when Pinellas County School District in Florida tested its teacher applicants, 30 percent of those applicants failed 8th grade, reading comprehension and 6th grade arithmetic tests on the first attempt. In 1979, in the Dallas Independent School District, 50 percent of the teacher applicants (majority of whom were minorities) failed 10th grade verbal and quantitative ability tests (Webster,1980).

Data compiled by Graduate Record Examination for 16 fields of study indicate that in 1975/76 teacher education majors had verbal scores lower than every other group except two. The verbal scores of education majors were 25 points below the national average and their quantitative scores were 51 points below national average (Weaver,1979).

Feistritzer of the National Center for Education Information (NCEI) in a 1983 report pointed out that college bound seniors planning to study education in 1982 scored 32 points below all college bound seniors on the verbal portion of the SAT and 48 points below on the mathematics section. Compared to the 36 possible fields of study open to a college bound senior, those who chose education ranked 33rd on their SAT scores. She further indicated that between 1973 and 1982, education majors dropped 24

points further behind on their verbal scores and 30 points behind on their mathematics scores.

Schlecty and Vance (1982) found a negative correlation between a student's performance on the verbal portion of the SAT and his/her preference to major in education. The researchers noted that whereas only 12 percent of those who scored in the highest fifth went into education, 40 percent of those in the lowest fifth decided to enter teaching.

This picture of college students majoring in education looks grim but the literature also suggests, however, that this has not always been the case for the profession. Learned and Wood (1938) compared the test scores of teacher education majors with those of other college majors in three different kinds of institutional settings : universities, four-year colleges and two-year colleges. The researchers found that the prospective teachers had a significantly higher average test score than the college average and ranked between the 40th and 50th percentile. In a similar study conducted in the 1950's for the Commission on Human Resources and Advanced Training, Wolfle (1954) noted that education majors clustered a few points below the mean for all college graduates, scoring at the 44th percentile on the Army General Classification Test. Povalko (1970) in a longitudinal study , 1957- 64, using a female high school in Wisconsin, observed that a greater percentage of the girls who went into teaching came from the upper one-third of the sample in terms of intellectual ability.

However, we cannot dwell on the past. The low ability type

of students (as evidenced by test scores) who are now attracted into teaching is very real. The question is, what might have caused this dramatic shift in the prospective teacher education population ? Other pertinent questions that may be asked are : Can the situation be salvaged through a series of tests? Granted that teacher education is now attracting low caliber students, can the testing movement reverse the trend ? Is it justifiable to determine, and even predict, the quality of the end product of teacher education programs solely on the basis of entry level performance? Finally, is there a significant positive correlation between high test scores and teaching success ?

Cole (1979) pungently answers some of these questions for us in his remarks that " minimum competence testing is a hollow means of judging the efficacy of teachers. It can only whittle away at the edges of the problem; it has no power to cure because it treats symptoms rather than causes" (p.223).

Quirk, Witten and Weinberg (1973) reviewed 18 studies conducted between 1940-71 and which dealt with the predictive validity of the National Teacher Examinations. A number of the studies specifically looked at the predictive ability of the NTE in relation to these criteria : (i) supervisors/principals' ratings; (ii) pupil ratings; (iii) pupil residual gains; (iv) classroom observation. The reviewers noted the following, among other things :

1. In the Delaney (1954) study the composite ratings of teaching success correlated .17 with NTE Weighted Common Examination Total (WCET).
2. In the Shea (1955) study the correlation between the

NTE and practice teaching was negative ($r = -.01$).

3. The correlations between the NTE and principals and supervisors' ratings were .18 and .17, respectively, in the Thacker (1964) study.
4. In the Eisey (1967) study low correlations ranging from $r = .01$ to $r = .16$ were observed between NTE WCET scores and such criteria as directing teaching rating(.14); university supervisor's rating(.09); teaching field GPA(.16); internship(.01); principal's rating for 1st yr.(.10), and 3rd yr.(.10).
5. The Walberg study indicated zero and negative correlations between NTE WCET scores and practice teaching grades, principals and supervisors' ratings of personal characteristics. For classroom performance correlation was ($r = .02$).
6. In the Carson (1969) study correlations between NTE WCET scores and principal's 12-week ratings of probationary teachers on criteria such as professional attitude, skill in teaching, class management, efficiency, were low, ranging from $-.03$ to $.16$.

Quirk, Witten and Weinberg also noted a negative correlation between NTE and pupils' ranking of their teachers ($r = -.30$). In general, the researchers found low and negative correlations between NTE WCET and teachers' on-the-job performance rating.

A longitudinal study conducted by the Division of Education, Mississippi Valley State University, in 1982, using its 1977-81

graduates indicated a negative correlation ($r = -.19$) between NTE and principals' ratings.

However, a few studies have indicated significant positive correlations between teachers' test scores and pupils' achievement. Konanc, Ferguson, and Sun (1980) in a study in one North Carolina school system noted a significant positive relationship between mean NTE scores and mean student achievement. Quirk, Witten, and Weinberg also noted one study with a correlation of .45 between pupil average residual gain and the NTE, but this finding is questionable due to the size of the sample ($N=7$). Levin (1970) in his re-analysis of some earlier data reported, among other things, that each additional point scored by teachers on the SAT verbal test adds .175 points to the verbal scores of black students and .179 points to the verbal scores of white students.

On the whole, however, the correlations between the NTE scores and teachers' on-the-job performance as indicated by principals and supervisors' ratings were, at best, low. A number of the correlations were even negative. With such correlations it is difficult to justify the growing obsession with testing teachers every inch of the way to ensure quality teaching.

SOME IMPLICATIONS OF THE TESTING MOVEMENT

Everything considered, however, the testing movement has a number of disturbing implications. For one, tests will not improve the overall quality of those who wish to enter the profession, as Gideonse (1984) argued; nor will tests bring quality and excellence into the classroom. The problem, it would appear, is that our knowledge of the dynamics of the teaching -

learning process is fuzzy and limited. We still do not know what makes a successful classroom teacher. Reducing teaching to "a set of discreet behaviors" (Stodolsky, 1984, p.17), measurable by tests, will not solve the problem. More research and analysis are therefore needed to help us understand the dynamics of successful classroom teaching.

The testing movement also has social implications for minorities. Since minorities are noted for their lack of sophistication and skill in test taking, the test movement has the potential to severely reduce the cadre of minorities attempting to enter the teaching profession - the one profession that has for a long time provided them with the only avenue for upward social mobility.

Finally, the badgering of teachers with tests could be a potential time bomb capable of undermining the prospects of the educational reform movement. The effects of these tests are beginning to be felt on some campuses where students are literally running away from teaching careers into areas where they can make much more money with no test hassles. Even experienced certified teachers are beginning to have second thoughts. Some states have started to experience teacher migrations, a condition which will intensify as more and more teachers decide to move to areas where recertification tests have not yet been mandated. Should this happen, the prospects of quality and excellence will be virtually dead for some states.

BEYOND TESTING

Testing is not and will never be the answer to the drive for

excellence and quality in teaching. The teaching profession is very much like other professions, and as such, it is very much subject to labor market dynamics (Weaver, 1984). Quality personnel are therefore attracted, not by test scores, but by salaries, incentives and conditions of service. Besides, talent tends to flow toward the highest bidder. If and when teachers' salaries become competitive, or even better than what is offered at the economic market-place to other college graduates with comparable training and experience, quality students will flow almost automatically into the profession; but not until then. The emphasis here is not on high salaries per se, but comparable salaries. The point is that regardless of how high teachers' salaries are in any given state, if the other professions and businesses are offering their entry level employees twice as much money as entry level teachers make in that state, we may as well forget our dream of attracting high ability students into teaching.

Of course, one recognizes the financial limitations of states to compete with other professions and businesses in terms of salaries, incentives and conditions of service provided for employees. Consequently, there is the need to be cautious and realistic. We need to realize by now that as long as teaching remains unattractive, salary-wise, the hope of recruiting high caliber students into the profession will for ever remain, at best, a dream. Such a prediction sounds rather pessimistic, to say the least, but in the face of present-day economic realities, survival, - economic survival, rather than altruism becomes the operative word. The one-time popular belief that the teacher's

reward is in heaven is a poor answer to the hell of present-day inflationary fires. This is why I am convinced that even the current efforts by state legislatures and educational institutions to attract high ability students into teaching through scholarships and other monetary incentives are doomed to fail if the ultimate profession itself is not made attractive. These latter measures, like the obsession with competency tests, once again, emphasize our inexplicable fascination with treating symptoms rather than causes in education.

Furthermore, one recognizes that salary alone will not and cannot reverse the trend of decreasing enrollments in Teacher Education, nor can it prevent the flight from the classroom by certified and experienced teachers. But testing can, and has. Test advocates are assuming that there is a pool of academically good students out there wanting to get into teaching. The truth of the matter is that all there is are those we have, - low ability students. Even these are running away from teaching too as a result of their inability to pass the various tests. Thus, the test "craze" is driving away prospective teachers but we do not have a similar mechanism for replacing those numbers. What is needed, therefore, is a means to diffuse this potential time bomb. However, in our obsession with tests and test scores, we tend to lose sight of the fact that many other variables are involved with the term quality in education. Quality in terms of teaching involves adequate funding for the schools; it involves a conducive school climate; quality teaching means control and discipline; and it also involves parental realization that

education is a mutual responsibility. All these, and many more, create quality teaching, quality teachers and, above all, quality education.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have sought to point out reasons to de-emphasize testing (which is becoming an obsession) as a means of assessing teacher quality. The issue is not how to develop more "efficient" tests, or how many more tests to impose on teachers, but, rather, how to improve the school climate and the conditions under which teachers work through such measures as competitive salaries, better parental cooperation, more authority for teachers to control and discipline and, finally, a less liberal judiciary interpretation of the bill of rights for students, so as to create a conducive atmosphere for quality teaching, quality teachers and quality education.

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